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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the institution of teacher education, stripped of its oppressive yet defining characteristics, is undergoing an identity crisis, a crisis that some teacher educators fear threatens the very core of teacher education. This paper draws upon central concepts from the psychoanalytic tradition and the work of several theorists including Castoriadis, Copjec, Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe, Lefort, and Zizek to explore this problem and outline a potential course of action to move beyond the impasse currently confronting progressive teacher education. As background, the paper points out that just as the members of most nations consider themselves part of "real," rather than "imaginary" communities, so too do teacher educators. It is from this implicit understanding that the desire for, and belief in, a concrete "identity" springs a distinctiveness that is most often sought in terms of invariable, and readily discernible, a priori features. In the case of teacher education, members of that community tend to identity themselves in relation to a clearly defined object of study, a distinct body of knowledge, and an exclusive register of practices; this desire is most readily evidenced in the relentless search for a research method and theory unique to teacher education, for a constitutive "Law." Contains 16 references. (BT)

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The Teaching Imaginary: Collective Identity in the Global Age.

by Derek Briton

Paper Presented to 1997 Graduate Student Research Conference: Educating in Global Times.

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Derek Briton

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the teaching imaginary: collective identity in the global age

a paper presented to 1997 *Graduate Student Research Conference: Educating in Global Times*

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> Every society up to now has attempted to give an answer to a few fundamental questions: Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what do we desire; what are we lacking? Society must define its "identity," its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires. Without the "answer" to these questions," without these "definitions," there can be no human world, not society, no culture—for everything would be an undifferentiated chaos. The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions, an answer that, obviously, neither "reality," nor "rationality" can provide.
>
> (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1987, pp. 146–147)

Introduction

Its roots firmly entrenched in the Western empirical-analytic tradition, the institution of teacher education, from its very inception, has looked to the "real" and the "rational" to "define its 'identity,' its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires." Only of late has it become apparent that "obviously, neither 'reality,' nor 'rationality' can provide" such answers. In spheres once the exclusive domain of the orthodoxy—teacher education publications, journals, and conferences—the institution's "answers" have been subjected to increasing scrutiny by an increasingly vocal lobby of educators

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committed to alternative forms of knowledge and pedagogy (Britzman et al, 1993; Giroux, 1991; Gore, 1993; Roman, 1993).

Inspired by the successes of feminist initiatives in other arenas, an alternative lobby of teacher educators has struggled unremittingly to strip the establishment's "answers" of their essentialist guise, unveil the exclusionary interests at play behind their universalist gloss, and expose their insensitivity to individual difference, whether of time, place, gender, race, sexual preference, or class. But having shattered the ideal image that has long served to unify the institution of teacher education, the alternative lobby, no longer united by a common cause, is in danger of dissipating into a plethora of special interest groups engaged in various forms of identity politics. As a result, the institution of teacher education, stripped of its oppressive yet defining characteristics, is undergoing an identity crisis, a crisis that some teacher educators fear threatens the very being of teacher education. How is this strange turn of events to be understood? What sort of response does this situation demand of teacher educators? Does the inherent tendency of all institutional forms to become oppressive bureaucratic structures mean that progressive teacher educators must relinquish the notion of working collectively to develop a set of inclusionary, rather than exclusionary, practices? If it is possible to work collectively within a nonbureaucratic organizational form, what might such an organization look like? This paper draws upon central concepts from the psychoanalytic tradition, and the work of several theorists working in that tradition—Castoriadis, Copjec, Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe, Lefort, and Zizek—to explore this perplexing problem and outline a potential course of action to move beyond the impasse currently confronting progressive teacher educators.

the nature of identity

What is it that makes a "Canadian" distinctly different from an "American"? While members of both collectivities will protest and defend their "differences," just how they are different is often a mystery to Canadians and Americans alike. The same is true for members of other nations. In fact, according to Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 3–6), the concepts "nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse." Such concepts, Anderson contends, are "cultural artifacts of a particular kind"; consequently, "to understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being," and "in what ways their meanings have changed over time." Descriptors

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such as "nation," and "teacher education," then, refer not to a set of objective or *real* features but *imaginary* relations. Why? Because teacher educators, not unlike "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."

However, just as the members of most nations consider themselves part of *real*, rather than *imaginary* communities, so too do teacher educators. It is from this implicit understanding that the desire for, and belief in, a concrete "identity" springs. This identity is most often sought in terms of a set of invariable, and readily discernible, a priori features. In the case of "teacher education," members of that community tend to identify themselves in relation to a clearly defined object of study, a distinct body of knowledge, and an exclusive register of practices. This desire is most readily evidenced in the relentless search for a research method and theory unique to teacher education, for a constitutive "Law." It is this perceived desire or "lack" that the institution of teacher education coalesces around, taking the form of a collective subject whose very being depends upon the knowledge of its own origins being hidden from itself. As with the individual subject of psychoanalysis, this collective subject exists neither prior to nor apart from its desire and is comprised of two distinct elements, elements analogous to the conscious and unconscious aspects of the individual. Consequently, it will be useful to say a little about how the psychoanalytic tradition arrives at and explains its notion of the bifurcated, decentred subject.

the subject of psychoanalysis

Jacques Lacan, the *enfant terrible* of psychoanalysis, traces the emergence of the modern subject—the self-conscious monad at the very centre of human being, the autonomous, rational agent that serves as the Western Humanist tradition's unshakeable foundation of Truth—to 17th Century France, to its first recorded expression in the work of René Descartes. According to Lacan, it was in the process of thinking that Descartes isolated his own awareness of himself, his self-consciousness. This act of reflection involves, "over and above the registration and perception of sensations, an *apperception*: an act of attributing perception to an underlying perceiver" (Grosz, 1990, p. 35, emphasis added). Hence Descartes' dictum: *Cogito ergo sum*; I think, therefore I am. It was this revelation that prompted Descartes to declare consciousness and subjectivity, thinking and being,

coterminous. It is Descartes' explicit formulation of the unitary, centred subject that Freud's discovery of the unconscious undermined, however, by revealing how "the very centre of the human being was no longer to be found at the place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition" (Lacan, 1977, p. 114). But it is Lacan who rephrases the question first posed by Freud's discovery of the unconscious, in a way that is more in keeping with theories of language and visual perception—de Saussure's linguistics, and Lorenz and Tinbergen's *Gestalten*—that postdate Freud's own work:

> Is the place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier concentric or eccentric, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified? (Lacan, 1977, p. 165)

The full implication of this rather cryptic statement should become clearer as we proceed.

subject as signifier

Lacan's answer to this question is, of course, *eccentric* or "decentred": "if we ignore the self's radical ex-centricity to itself with which man is confronted, in other words, the truth discovered by Freud, we shall falsify both the order and methods of psychoanalytic mediation...: the letter as well as the spirit of Freud's work" (Lacan, 1977, p. 171). Following Freud, Lacan constructs a topography that reveals the subject to be the occupant of different places or locations: one the realm of "signifiers," of conscious discourse; the other of "signifying mechanisms," of the unconscious that shapes the "signified" and can, therefore, be designated legitimately as thought. Since this means "the speaking subject is emphatically decentred in relation to the ego" (Boothby, 1991, p. 112), Lacan (1977, p. 166) proposes a reformulation of Descartes' Cogito:

> I think [on an unconscious level, at the level of the "signified"] where I am not [that is, on a conscious level, at the level of the "signifier"], therefore I am where I do not think.

What Descartes fails to recognize, according to Lacan, is that the concept "I" must be understood as a "sign" comprised of not one but *two* elements. These elements correspond to Saussure's (1983) "signifier" and "signified," to the *material* and *ideational* aspects that each and every sign comprises of, to the sign's extramental and intramental attributes.

Saussure's sign

While it was Saussure (1983) who first argued that the relation of the material signifier to the ideational signified, of word to thought object, is arbitrary—that is, established through convention rather than some natural or preordained connection—it was Lacan (1977) who took up and extended Saussure's metaphor of "two floating kingdoms" to introduce the possibility of slippage between the two domains, arguing vehemently for "the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (p. 154). In placing the signified *below* the signifier, Lacan deliberately privileges the sign's extramental, material element over its intramental, ideational element. Lacan then designates the "subject of the signifier"—the subject of consciousness, that which is enunciated through and in language, with the matheme "S"; and the "subject of the signified"—the subject of the unconscious, that which *structures* enunciation, with the matheme "*s*".[1] For Lacan, the crucial point that cannot be ignored is that "the S and the *s* of the Sausserian algorithm are not on the same level" (p. 166).

According to Lacan, the individual's introduction into language is the condition for the possibility of the modern subject, for the subject's ability to "unknowingly" represent its own desire to itself. It is "in the unconscious, excluded from the system of the ego, that the subject speaks" (Lacan, in Boothby, 1991, p. 111). As Slavoj Zizek

[1] In his inaugural lecture to the Collége de France, Michel Foucault (1970, in Foucault, 1984, p. 108) speaks of his own desire to assume the unproblematic position of the spoken subject—the enunciated subject, the subject of the signifier—rather than the highly contentious position of the speaking subject—the subject of enunciation, the subject of the signified:

> I wish I could have slipped surreptitiously into this discourse which I must present today, and into the ones I shall have to give here, perhaps for many years to come. I should have preferred to be enveloped by speech, and carried away well beyond all possible beginnings, rather than have to begin it myself. I should have preferred to become aware that a nameless voice was already speaking long before me, so that I should only have needed to join in, to continue the sentence it had started and lodge myself, without really being noticed, in its interstices, as if it had signalled me by pausing, for an instant, in suspense.

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(1992, p. 68) notes: "the Lacanian notion of the imaginary [enunciated] self... exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition." It is not, however, the supposed inability of this self to reflect that Lacan focuses on, "on its being the plaything of inaccessible unconscious forces; his point is that the subject can pay for such reflection with the loss of his [or her] ontological consistency."

enunciated versus enunciator

Misunderstandings of Lacan's position are legend, yet for many commentators are readily explicable.[2] A failure to grasp Lacan's distinction between the two subject positions—between the "enunciated subject" and the "subject of enunciation"—is often a source of much confusion. It is useful to bear in mind, therefore, that if the unconscious is the locus of thought—the subject of enunciation—and the conscious subject is the locus of language—the enunciated subject—an irremediable gap between what is *meant* and what is *said* becomes apparent: "Lacan's point is simply that these two levels never fully cohere: the gap separating them is constitutive; the subject, by definition, cannot master the effects of his [or her] speech" (Zizek, 1994, p. 13). It is for this very reason that "the implications of meaning infinitely exceed the signs manipulated by the individual. As far as signs are concerned, man is always mobilizing many more of them that he knows" (Lacan, in Felman, 1987, pp. 95–96).

Consequently, the unconscious, the domain of the subject of enunciation, is a site of unmeant knowledge that escapes intentionality and meaning, appearing to

[2] Metz (1982, p. 223), for instance, suggests that Lacan's "*Écrits* make no claim to didactic clarity, at least in the ordinary sense (because I think they possess another kind of clarity, profoundly didactic in its own way: blindingly so, to the point that the reader represses it and makes enormous efforts not to understand)." Of Lacan's elusive, protracted style Boothby (1991, pp. 16–17) declares:

> The difficulty of Lacan's style is not wholly unintentional. Convinced that the curative effect of analysis does not consist in *explaining* the patient's symptoms and life history, convinced, that is, that the analyst's effort to *understand* the patient only impedes the emergence of the unconscious within the transference and that what is effective in analysis concerns something beyond the capacity of the analysis to explain, Lacan's discourse is calculated to frustrate facile understanding. His aim in part is to replicate for his readers and listeners something of the essential opacity and disconnectedness of the analytic experience. Often what is required of the reader in the encounter with Lacan's dense and recalcitrant discourse, as with that of the discourse of the patient in analysis, is less an effort to clarify and systematize than a sort of unknowing mindfulness. We are called upon less to close over the gaps and discontinuities in the discourse than to remain attentive to its very lack of coherence, allowing its breaches and disalignments to become the jumping-off points for new movements of thought.

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the conscious subject only in the form of verbal slips and dream images—it is a *speaking* knowledge that is denied to the *speaker's* knowledge. As Boothby (1991, p. 126) notes: "the tendency of discourse to evoke a multitude of meanings—what might be called the essential 'extravagance' of speech—establishes the capacity of language to accommodate unconscious intentionality even in the most apparently mundane and innocent banter"; thus, we witness in the "multiple reverberations of meaning generate within the symbolic system as a whole by the signifying chain... what Lacan calls the 'decentering of the subject'." The unconscious, then, can be characterized as "knowledge that can't tolerate one's knowing that one knows," and it is psychoanalysis that "appears on the scene to announce that there is knowledge that does not know itself, knowledge that is supported by the signifier as such" (Lacan, in Felman, 1987, p. 77).

The point that should not be missed here is that *the very condition for the possibility* of conscious knowledge is the *active* repression of some other knowledge at the level of the unconscious.[3] Ignorance is not the *absence* of knowledge but the *negative* condition for the possibility of *any* positive knowledge: the gap between knowing and not knowing, consequently, can never be closed. As Felman (1987, pp. 77–78) notes:

> there can be no such thing as absolute knowledge: absolute knowledge is knowledge that has exhausted its own articulation, but articulated knowledge is by definition what cannot exhaust its own self-knowledge. For knowledge to be spoken, linguistically articulated, it would constitutively have to be supported by the ignorance carried by language, the ignorance of the *excess of signs* that of necessity is language—its articulation—"mobilizes."

[3] It is for this reason that Foucault's notion of the subject, the subject of produced through the process(es) of subjectivization, must be dismissed as lacking. According to Foucault (1982)—see also his account of Bentham's Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977)—the subject is totally constituted and determined by the apparatuses of Power. That is, the *only* knowledge the subject possesses is that which the apparatuses of Power instill in her or him. This, however, overlooks the fact that the *condition for the possibility of* conscious knowledge is the negation of some other knowledge that must remain hidden to and from the subject of subjectivization. The subject, in fact, can never be totally determined by, or transparent to, the apparatuses of Power, as is confirmed by the ongoing resistance of subjects to the System, despite the best efforts of the mechanisms of Power—for Althusser (1971), "Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)"—to quell such resistance. See Copjec (1989) for a closer analysis of the important differences between structuralist and psychoanalytic accounts of the subject.

the collective subject

If we now return to the collective subject that emerges through the institution of teacher education, we see that it is in repressing its knowledge of its origins on one level that this collective subject is able to represent to itself on another the object of its desire: an objective set of defining characteristics. But what are these two levels that correspond to the individual subject's conscious and unconscious dimensions? The first, according to Claude Lefort, is the "Social": it corresponds to the conscious subject, the subject of the signifier, the enunciated subject, the imaginary ego. The second is the "Political": it corresponds to the unconscious subject, the subject of enunciation the subject of the signified, the ego ideal. The institution of teacher education entails, then, the coming into being of a *split* collective subject that must repress all knowledge of its origins on the level of the Social, in order to be able to re-present its own desire to itself, in the form of an ideal image—an objective set of defining characteristics: the Law—on the level of the Political. It is important to recognize, however, that the Lacanian notion of Law at play here is not merely prohibitory but also enabling, something conceived as an agency of 'disalienation' and 'liberation': it opens up our access to desire by enabling us to disengage ourselves from the rule of the Other's whim" (Zizek, 1994, p. 265). Under the Law, the emergence of "education" as a Law-governed practice allows teacher educators to distinguish themselves from the "Other," to identify with one another and see themselves as distinct from all other fields of academic endeavor.

However, for teacher educators to be able to re-cognize themselves in the idealized re-presentation of their collective desire on the level of the political—in the re-presentation of that desire as a Law—the Political ideal of "teacher education" must appear greater than, and qualitatively different from, the various practices that continue to emerge on the level of the Social—for example: "essentialism," "perennialism," "progressivism," "reconstuctionism," "existentialism," "conservatism," "liberalism," "humanism," "behaviourism," "radicalism," "philosophical analysis," etc.—and which define themselves in terms of that Political ideal. That is, the Political ideal must be seen to function as the immaterial *signified* that gives meaning to, that defines, that constitutes, a set of concrete, *material* practices as teacher education. This raises the question of the exact nature of the Political ideal, of its "essence" or "meaning."

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the quilting point

That this Master Signifier to which all the various signifiers refer can somehow be cashed-out in terms of a set of objective features—*the* one and only, True definition—is the largely unquestioned belief of the field. In fact, this "multitude of 'floating signifiers'... is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning" (Zizek, 1994, p. 87). It is the Political ideal image, the signifier "teacher education," that serves as this "nodal point." It may be easier to grasp this process of "quilting" if we take the term "radical democracy" as a corollary of the term "teacher education" ad observe how this signifier, this ideal image, serves to "quilt," to sustain the *identity* of diverse fields of political endeavor, in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe (1985). Slavoj Zizek (1991, pp. 88–89) offers the following account of this process at play:

> Let us take the Laclau/Mouffe project of radical democracy: here, we have an articulation of particular struggles (for peace, ecology, feminism, human rights, and so on), none of which pretends to the "Truth," the last Signified, the "true Meaning" of all the others; but the title "radical democracy" itself indicates how the very possibility of their articulation implies the "nodal," determining role of a certain struggle which, precisely as a particular struggle, outlines the horizon of all the other struggles. This determining role belongs, of course, to democracy, to "democratic invention": according to Laclau and Mouffe, all other struggles (socialist, feminist...) could be conceived as the gradual radicalization, extension, application of the democratic project to new domains (of economic relations, of the relations between sexes...). The dialectical paradox lies in the fact that the particular struggle playing a hegemonic role, far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, opens the very space for the relative autonomy of the particular struggles: the feminist struggle, for example, is made possible only through reference to democratic-egalitarian political discourse.

In the case of teacher education, "the dialectical paradox lies in the fact that the particular struggle playing a hegemonic role [that of the orthodoxy], far from enforcing a violent suppression of the differences, *opens the very space* for the relative autonomy of the particular [feminist, class, race, gender...] struggles." The irony in the current situation, then, is that the alternative lobby, in struggling to shatter the orthodoxy's image of teacher education, threatens to destroy that which

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"opens the very space for the particular struggles" that constitute the alternative lobby. This strange turn of events has arisen in teacher education, and arises in other institutions, when those who come to embody the institution's Political mandate, whether in a democratic or totalitarian manner, declare this Law—as they are inevitably inclined to do so—greater than, separate from, and independent of the Social.

the problem of the political

Of course, divorcing the Political from the Social generates legitimation problems. I the name of what, for instance, might the will of the Law be imposed—the Good of the many, individual freedom, Truth? If the Political, on the one hand, simply imposes its will, the Social will inevitably revolt, but if the Political, on the other, is reduced to the Social, it can no longer serve as the Law of the institution. The dilemma of the Political is one all institutions must contend with: the institution, in the act of distinguishing itself from Other fields of endeavor, comes into being *only* through its Political self-re-presentation. In whatever form the Political is represented, the problem remains the same: the Law must *appear* abiding, yet open to change; legislators are necessarily of the Social, yet must determine the Law for All; movements within the Social, whether of a social or political nature, re-present particular interests within the Social, but must do so in the name of the Whole institution. The expectation is for the Political to be *within* the Social and concerned with the particular on the one hand, yet *without* and concerned with the Universal, on the other (Howard, 1977). The question remains, however, of what courses of action are open to teacher educators, given the above and the institution of teacher education's current predicament.

choosing a course of action

The issue of concern to teacher educators here, is clearly one of power: in the name of what is power to be exercised, and on whom and by whom? Lefort maintains that while power must be represented, it is neither something that one can, nor should try to, determine empirically: it is a derivative of L'imaginaire, the Imaginary, whose "function is to neutralize the conflictual origins of the social, to create the illusion of permanence and necessity" (Howard, 1977, p. 256). The function of the imaginary, then, is to diffuse the divisive forces inherent to the institution, and it is in situations where Power is separated absolutely from the

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social, usually through an appeal to some form of transcendental legitimation, that institutions are most stable.

The price of such stability however, is the blind imposition of Law on the Social. But Lefort contends that if *lived experience* is ever reduced to, that is, explained and determined solely in terms of, either the Political or the Social, the institution is being governed *ideologically*. For Lefort, "ideology is articulated in the attempt to re-create the... [institution] without history. The neglect of origins, the denial of the division, and the pretence of rendering the social space self-transparent are its characteristics" (Howard, 1977, p. 256). For Lefort, then, any attempt to situate and occupy Power in either the sphere of the Political or the Social is ideological: to attempt to do so in the Political is to identify oneself as an expert/leader; to attempt to do so in the Social is to identify oneself as an activist/militant. If we consider the course of action open to teacher educators in this light, it becomes possible to identify which of the competing Master signifiers are ideological attempts to situate and occupy Power in either the Political or Social.

leader, militant, or teacher educator

The first course of action open to teacher educators is to identify with the orthodoxy, to assume the mandate of expert/leader. This is to situate Power in the Political and divorce the Political from the Social by legitimating Power in terms of the "scientism" of the Western empirical-analytic tradition. While this will undoubtedly provide the institution with a greater measure of stability, it is an ideological course of action because, in attempting to "bridge" the gap between the Political and the Social, it reduces lived experience to the Political and in so doing diffuses the creative potential between the two poles.

The second course of action open to teacher educators is to identify with the alternative lobby, to assume the mandate of the activist/militant. This is to situate Power in the Social and reduce the Political to the Social, making it impossible to legitimate the Law in terms of something that appears greater than and different from the Social. This course of action too, then, is ideological because it tries to "mask" the difference between the Political and the Social and in so doing, it too diffuses the creative tension generated between these twin poles.

According to Lefort, the only non-ideological course open to the teacher educator is to pursue a theory of the institution that she or he knows can only be philosophical. To think one can do more is self-deluding and *dangerous*. A theory

that ignores its own limits inevitably falls prey to ideology of one variety or the other. The task, according to Lefort, is to participate from "one's own place: one analyses, writes, talks. No more can be done.... To want to be the leader, or to think of oneself as the militant, is to be open to contradiction in one's own attitudes and from the social reality itself" (Howard, 1977, p. 260). The challenge lies in resisting the temptation to diffuse the creative tension between the poles of the Political and Social by attempting either to dispel or ignore the difference between the two poles: in pursuing a *philosophy*.[4] Does this mean, then, that progressive teacher educators must relinquish the idea of collectively pursuing nonexclusionary, mutually beneficial ends?

Unlike Lefort, Castoriadis (1987) maintains that while bureaucratization is a constant threat to progressive organizations, it is something they must simply learn to counteract because social change requires collective action. For Castoriadis, "it is the stunting of the creative imagination of individuals, due to the existence of a socially legitimated collective representation—an *imaginaire social*...—which must be analysed" (Howard, 1977, p. 265). Far from static or predictable, Castoriadis contends that the activity of everyday life is praxical, that

> the educator, artist or even doctor does not know the final result he/she seeks; nor does he/she simply follow material lines of force as if they could be somehow read directly from the given, as if the given were immediately and univocally signifying, as in the dream world of the positivist. There is an indeterminateness in every praxis: the project is changed as it encounters the materiality of the works; and the visage of the world is altered once my project contacts it. (Howard, 1977, p. 287)

Castoriadis is singular in his insistence that the action of *individuals* does not constitute praxis. Individuals are *always-already* social beings, embodied agents plagued by the unconscious, the multivalency of representation, and desire. That humans must contend with such "impurities," that they can never have complete knowledge of themselves, is overlooked by those of a rationalist persuasion in their zeal to escape humanity's "tainted" state of embodiment. This leads them to ignore

[4] As Howard notes: for Lefort, "the task of philosophy (or theory) becomes an eminently moral one, social and engaged, which consists in uncovering the moments of praxis within a given social and historical structure." Consequently, this notion of philosophy must be distinguished from that of the Western empirical-analytic tradition: *theoria*—the pursuit of timeless, placeless, abiding Truths.

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the more important question of what exactly our relation to the unconscious the multivalency or representation, and desire really is. Castoriadis, however, insists that we "can relate to them, act on and through them, only because they are Other, always already present and continually changing. They are the horizon that gives sense to thought and action *the condition for the possibility of* creation" (Howard, 1977, p. 287). It is through embodiment that humans partake in an intersubjective world of symbolically mediated discourse since the body opens humans beings to not only the discourse of the Other but also the unconscious.

As Howard (1977, pp. 288–289) notes, for Castoriadis, Otherness is the condition of possibility of praxis, and alienation is not simply a result of the domination of the Other, but the fact that the Other to whom we relate "*disappears*, slides into an anonymous collectivity (the law, the market, the plan, etc.)." While alienation is unquestionably supported and fostered by those who stand to benefit from it, the fact remains that it "is concerned fundamentally with the relation of society to its own institutions," with "a struggle for the transformation of the relation of society to its institutions," with "the phantasm of the organization as a well-oiled machine." Castoriadis thus contends that "the kinds of struggle which one finds occurring today, in all spheres of society, from the family to the military, from the ecological to the ethnic, including many of those at the workplace [not to mention the realm of teacher education], find their unification in a revolt against the manner in which bureaucratic society perpetuates itself through this phantasm"; consequently, "they can be seen as attempts to reinstitute a praxical relation to the social institution." Castoriadis (in Howard, 1977, p. 291) cautions, however, that

> it is doubtful that one can directly grasp this fundamental phantasm; at best it can be reconstructed from its manifestations because, in effect, it appears as the foundation of the possibility and unity of everything that makes up the singularity everything which, in the life of the subject, goes beyond its reality and its history. It is the ultimate condition permitting the surging forth of a reality and a history for the subject.

Castoriadis's project is to reveal how the institution comes to ignore its own nature as instituting and how alienation is the constitutive lack around which it is structured. For Castoriadis (in Howard, 1977, p. 299), the organization, once instituted, only *appears* to be an inert object, and the struggle is to help the organization

> recognize itself as instituting, auto-institute itself explicitly, and surmount the self-perpetuation of the institute by showing itself capable of taking it up and transforming it according to its own exigencies and not according to the inertia of the institute, to recognize itself as the source of its own alterity..., to go beyond the frontier of the theorizable... [to] the terrain of creative history.

What collectivity of progressive teacher educators can do, then, is change the relation of teacher education to its institution by making apparent and opening to debate what has been theretofore mystified and repressed. The task of the organization is not so much to lead as to open and maintain reflection. If specific demands are advanced, they must be understood not as legislative imperatives but in terms of their interrogatory effect. What Castoriadis, in contradistinction to Lefort, offers progressive teacher educators is a new way of exploring collective forms of practice, forms wherein, however, the fundamental task remains, always, to rethink the theory on which the collectivity's political activity has been built. As Zizek (1993, p. 2) notes:

> the duty of the critical intellectual—if, in today's "postmodern" universe, this syntagm has any meaning left—is precisely *to occupy all the time*, even when the new [Political] order (the "new harmony") stabilizes itself and again renders invisible the hole as such, *the place of this hole*, [the void the Political masks], i.e., to maintain a distance toward every reigning Master Signifier.

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